(c) if so, whether steps would be taken to utilize above fund for the welfare of NRKs;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (e) Prior to the introduction of the Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) on 25.12.2003, emigrant workers recruited directly by the foreign employers were required to make a compulsory security deposit equivalent to one way return airfare while seeking emigration clearance. The purpose was to meet the cost of repatriation of the emigrant worker if required. The emigrant workers could claim the security on his/her return to India. As per information available in this Ministry an amount of around Rs. 28 crore is held as security deposit in the Government account and the refund of deposits are being made as and when claims are filed, from time to time. These funds will continue to be held as security deposit and refunded to the relevant workers upon claims filed.

Independent of this the Ministry has proposed creation of an Overseas Workers Welfare Fund for meeting various on site, off site and other welfare needs of the emigrants and the returnees.

Minimum wage to Indian workers

2725. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is proposed to take up the matter with the Arabian and other Asian countries to provide a minimum wage to Indian worker;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (c) The Government has prescribed minimum wages only for women household service workers emigrating to the Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries. The minimum wage will be fixed by the Indian Missions concerned in the range of US $ 300-350 after taking into account the prevailing market wage in that country. It is intended to serve as a benchmark for the Indian Missions for attesting work contracts and for the Protectors of Emigrants before granting emigration clearance. This has been done for the women household service workers because they are not covered by the labour laws in the country of employment. As regards the monthly wage of other overeseas workers it is a matter between the employer and the worker as set out in the employment contract arrived at by mutual agreement based on market conditions. Therefore, the Government has not prescribed a minimum wage for other sectors.

Work visa for workers in Kuwait

2726. SHRI P.R. RAJAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Kuwait has stopped issuing work visas for Indians at any time;

(b) if so, the steps Government has taken to protect NRIs in Kuwait; and

(c) the details thereof?